1948

Montana novel before 1914

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THE MONTANA NOVEL BEFORE 1914

by

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1936

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts

Montana State University

1948

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study is to examine the Montana novel before 1914 in the attempt to learn what themes and attitudes toward life seemed important to the writers and consequently what view of Montana might be taken by the readers of these novels. Since Montana's was not an isolated development culturally, one may expect to find no immediate departure from the general trend of American fiction.

By a Montana novel is meant a sustained work of fiction by a person resident of Montana at some period, or a work of fiction about Montana by a non-resident.

A hypothesis held by Professor H. G. Merriam, chairman of the division of the humanities at Montana State University, is that literary development on a newly-settled portion of the American West took this chronological course:

(a) nostalgic and pietistic literature, bringing materials from former environment

(b) literature of bravado, extolling the achievement of those who succeeded in the new environment

(c) descriptive literature

(d) interpretative literature.

Although the scope of the present study is insufficient to substantiate this hypothesis, the novels will be considered with Dr. Merriam's hypothesis in mind.

As indicated by the Table of Contents, the thesis is organized around the work of ten authors which appears to fall in six separate

divisions:

(1) the nostalgic novel of the 1870's

(2) the dime novel tradition of the 1890's

(3) the emergence of conflicting attitudes between Montana and the East, in the 1890's

(4) the Montana historical novels of the early 1900's

(5) the sentimental novel of ranch life at the turn of the century

(6) the setting of a tradition for Montana 'Western' (i.e. cowboy) fiction.

A chronology of the Montana novel during this period is found in the Appendix.

Bibliographical Note

In the search for early Montana novels, assistance was given by the librarians of the state (particularly Mrs. Anne O. McDonnell and Mrs. Lucinda B. Scott of the Historical Society of Montana, Helena) and by collectors of Montana literature. A newspaper and radio appeal was made stating the purpose of the search and asking that persons knowing of early works of Montana fiction get in touch with the investigator.

Because of the scarcity of bibliographical materials available on the subject, this study cannot claim completeness. It is possible that a Montana novel pre-dates Clare Lincoln, by Decius S. Wade, published in 1876 and generally thought to be the first novel by a Montanan. However, such a novel, if it does exist, was not discovered in the bibliographical search made during the preparation of this thesis.

I

DECIUS S. WADE: Nostalgia for New England (1876)

Clare Lincoln: A Novel,[1] by Decius S. Wade, third chief justice of Montana Territory, is not only the first novel to be written by a Montanan (so far as is known), but one of the best. "This unpretending book, written in leisure hours while seeking rest from arduous labours on the Bench," as Wade termed it in his dedication, may not have seemed of great importance to its author when compared to the legal opinions over his signature which fill more than half of the first six volumes of the Montana Supreme Court reports,[2] but Clare Lincoln is of interest today not only for its own merits, but for the place it occupies in the segment of literary history chosen for exploration here.

What sort of novel might be written in Montana in 1876, in a territorial capitol which but a decade before had been the scene of a great gold strike and which was still, in the 1870's, a bustling mining center? Turning to Clare Lincoln, we will find that the mind of the novelist had its own environment, far removed from the everyday scenes of his life in Helena. Why should a Montana chief justice write a novel in the nineteenth century sentimental and pietistic tradition, with its setting in New England? A study of Wade's life suggests that

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[1] Decius S. Wade, Clare Lincoln: A Novel (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1876), 451 pp.

[2] C. P. Connolly, "Three Lawyers of Montana," Magazine of Western History, 14:59, May, 1891.

he was projecting into his novel his own idealized concept of what life might be like under the quieter conditions of a long-established community. For his setting, what more natural choice than New England? It was known to him, as to a goodly number of his Montana contemporaries, by inheritance and early training. There is a hint in Wade's choice, corroborated in some utterances of the period which will be cited later, that these early Montanans did not consider themselves as pioneers of a new American tradition, or even as Montanans, except temporarily and more or less by chance. They were citizens of the world, partakers of a more generous culture than that of the frontier. Why, then, should Justice Wade not write a novel which belongs to one of the main idea-currents of his times?

A literary tradition for Montana chief justices had been set by Hezekiah L. Hosmer, the first incumbent of that office, who before coming to Montana in Ohio, had written, in 1856, a novel called The Octoroon. The book, published three years later, became the basis for Boucicault's play of the same name, which had a great popular success and was a mainstay of traveling theatrical troupes for many years.[3]

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[3] "Biographical Sketch of Hezekiah L. Hosmer, First Chief Justice of Montana Territory, Revised by his son, J. A. Hosmer," Contributions of the Historical Society of Montana, Vol. 3 (Helena: State Publishing Company, 1900), p. 288. Hosmer's son, J. Allen Hosmer, produced as a boy the first book printed in Montana Territory, A Trip to the States, which he wrote and printed himself. The book is now a collector's item.

The opinions and addresses of men like Hosmer and Wade, together with the proceedings of the Montana Bar Association, suggest that these Montanans of the early territorial days were men of a high degree of intelligence, professional skill, and ethics, who had not only a sound legal training, but a general education comparable with the best American standards of their day. Many of them were from Ohio, where American westward migration had left a strong New England pattern. Judge Hosmer himself, in his address before the Travellers' Club in New York in 1866, is frank to state the motive which brought some of these well-educated men to Montana:

> Of course, as soon as it was known that gold was to be found, provisions came, saw mills followed, and bankers and brokers were not far in the rear. Another class, I mean lawyers, about as suddenly appeared and began to ply their trade in Virginia.[4]

Hosmer's Montana contemporaries viewed themselves, his account shows, not as men hewing out a civilization from the wilderness, but as members of a cosmopolitan community having rapid mail connections with all points, a community which took pride in being in close touch with developments elsewhere. Mining communities were like that. They had to be. No one knew when a piece of news, from the report of a new "strike" to rumor of European war, might alter the value of his holdings and his activities. But there was nother reason for this cosmopolitan awareness, this general

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[4] Hezekiah L. Hosmer, Montana: An Address Delivered by Chief-Justice H. L. Hosmer before the Travellers' Club, New York City, January, 1866 (pamphlet in collection of Historical Society of Montana, Helena, Montana), p. 5.

sophistication, of the mining frontier, and that was the high level of skill and experience of its people. Hosmer says:

> It is generally supposed that the men who thus toil for gold belong exclusively to the laboring classes. This is not the case. I have seen lawyers, judges, clergymen, ex-members of Congress, ex-governors, merchants, even professors of the highest character in their own homes, toiling side by side with laborers from nearly all the nations of Europe... [The miners] are generally people of thought. Those who lack culture, supply its place with experience.[5]

Justice Wade was not lacking in either culture or experience, and he had no intention of using the raw materials of life in a Montana mining camp when he turned from his legal work to find solace and recreation in the writing of fiction. Instead, he produced a thorough-going New England novel and sent it to the Riverside Press (later Houghton, Mifflin Company), Cambridge, Massachusetts, for publication.

Clare Lincoln affords no hint of the Montana frontier in the early '70's. The opening line of the book, "It is sunset in New England," sets the tone for a story of gentle Victorian virtue, whose romantic idealism is broken only by the realistic portrayal of two shyster lawyers, who may have been drawn from life in Virginia City or Helena. There is no direct evidence for this assumption, however, and the characterizations may equally have been inspired by Judge Wade's experiences in Ohio,

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[5] Ibid., p. 9.

where he grew up and began his career in law and politics.[6]

Except for the occasional lapse into realism, however, Clare Lincoln merits the comment of the reviewer in the Helena Daily Independent, August 8, 1876, who observed:

> The reader of Clare Lincoln is charmed by a freshness and vigor of recital inexpressibly agreeable to the dilletante (sic) in literature upon whose senses has palled the outre and prurient sentiments with which the professional novelist too frequently interlards his pages. It treats of the affections and is redolent of plot and passion, but is replete with tender and elegant sentiment and expressed in graceful and fascinating dictum.

Apparently that coarseness and strength which Frederick Jackson Turner was to ascribe to the frontier did not apply to frontier literary criticism!

The "tender and elegant sentiment" has the freshness of novelty after seventy-two years and the intervening spate of naturalistic novels. It would be a grave error to underestimate Wade's achievement because his themes have become too familiar and because the style

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[6] Joaquin Miller, An Illustrated History of the State of Montana. (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1904), p. 104. Wade lived in Ohio until he came to Montana in 1871, at the age of thirty-five, to take office as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Montana Territory, by appointment of President Grant. Judge Wade's family background included a New England homestead; his earliest American ancestor settled at Medford, Massachusetts, five or six miles outside Boston, in 1634. There the Wade family took a prominent part in New England life; his grandfather, after fighting at Bunker Hill and serving all through the Revolutionary War, moved with his family to Ohio in 1821. Wade himself returned East and died at Little Medford, Ohio, in 1905.

and ideas of the period have been often parodied by a more irreverent age. Yet in spite of the fact that the tone of American fiction has changed considerably since the sentimental idealism of Clare Lincoln, much of the novel is close enough to continuing American preoccupations to evoke recognition in the reader of today:

> "My child," answered the father, "youth is the time to acquire an education, and if it is neglected, if the golden opportunity passes unimproved, it is gone forever, and all after life is miserable because of this neglect. In your case, whatever sacrifice it requires your parents make it most cheerfully, that you may acquire something no misfortune can take from you. It is a thousand times better that you should know something and be poor, than to be rich and an ignoramus."
>
> "But father how can I study, how can I remain at school while you and mother are drudging your lives away at home?... No, let me remain and work with you on the farm, I can do almost a man's work now."
>
> "My brave boy, do you remember that you are a Pembroke, and that the honor and the name of the family will soon rest upon your shoulders, and what would grandfathers Richard, Reuben, and James think of your parents or yourself, if you came to man's estate without an education. The farm is safe as long as we pay the interest, and that we shall do in the future, as we have done in the past."
>
> Richard was absorbed in deep thought, almost a trance: who knows but what he was communing with the illustrious dead, who came to whisper to him words of cheer and hope? ...From whatever good source the resolution came, he aroused from his reverie and said, "Father, I will go to school."[7]

A modern American would say "It is better to be educated and rich," and would perhaps place less emphasis on the family tree, but parental

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[7] Wade, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

sacrifice for education, emphasis on youth, assumption of paramount values in education, and financial determinism are themes still dominant in American life.

Clare Lincoln belongs to the full-bodied tradition of the English sentimental novel whose writers were virtuosos of the plot if not of the character element in their stories. The year 1876, when Wade's novel appeared, marks an important event which was to change the course of the writing of fiction: publication of the first novel of Henry James. To appreciate Wade's full accomplishment, one must forget that the time was coming when a novelist would concentrate on the mind's interior action to such exclusion, at times, of plot components that the reader might sometimes be unsure what had happened, if anything, in the exterior life of his characters. Clare Lincoln tells a romantic tale, with the plot complications which literate Englishmen and Americans had grown to expect. It is the eighteenth century sentimental novel with a strong grafting-on of nineteenth-century moral and pietistic principles. It also has a strong claim to consideration as a philosophical novel.

The story outline of Clare Lincoln is as follows: After the talk with his father, Richard Pembroke, the young hero of the story, goes to the Academy, where he learns that "honest toil and industry is the only road to true nobility....This lesson is better than a thousand legacies of fleeting wealth." [8] Then he enters Harvard, where his father had been

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[8] Ibid., p. 58. The point is reiterated throughout the story.

educated. Finishing his course several months ahead of Commencement, he accepts a post as teacher of the village school near his home. One of his pupils is Clare Lincoln, then only a pretty child of thirteen. But for Wade, the thoughts of youth were indeed long thoughts:

> She believed that life should be full of activity, thought and labor; that it was a preparatory period, the primary department in a never-ending course of progress and development, and that the advancement made here in knowledge, in morality, in virtue, in the affections and sympathies, and in all that expands and enlarges the mind and the soul, would entitle us to a higher place in the great hereafter; and hence she aspired to all knowledge and to all virtue....She could see so much to accomplish in life, and the alloted time was so short, that she ever felt in haste to improve every fleeting moment; for in her towering ambition she would learn all mathematics, all philosophy and history, the arts and sciences, painting and poetry, not simply for the satisfaction of knowing them, but because she thought the cultivated mind became nearer perfection, and nearer the god-like, than those who were content to remain in ignorance and darkness.
>
> Thus, infinitely beneficial as she thought a cultured mind was to its possessor, involving consequences, as she believed, that reached eternity, yet not for herself alone was she ambitious for an education. Disinterestedly generous and benevolent, willing ever to sacrifice herself for the happiness of others, she would study and become learned that she might have the means and the power to succor those in distress, to lend a helping hand to those in need, to aid the struggling and the weary, and to relieve the heavy laden of their burdens.[9]

Wade seems to imply that such ideas were innate in a fine woman, who required only the ennobling experience of motherhood to give her "the sublime courage and faith that only come from a mother's holy love, and which so exalts woman above man, and makes her a little lower than the angels."[10]

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[9] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[10] Ibid., p. 12.

This last is from a description of Richard's mother. She and Clare combined provide Richard with his ideal of Woman and it may be noted that these ladies had a counterpart in Wade's own life. His wife, reports a biographer, brought him "all the wealth of a noble nature, all the intuitions of refinement and culture and all the aspirations of noble womanhood."[11] Wade acknowledges his debt to her in the dedication:

> To my wife, Bernice Calpin Wade: whose nobility of character and world of love is an inspiration ever of noble thoughts; and whose daily walk and conversation is a perpetual illustration of a beautiful life and an exalted soul.[12]

It is possible that the character of Clare Lincoln represented the novelist's aspirations for his own daughter, as she could not have been over Clare Lincoln's age at the time the book was written.

Clare Lincoln, although excelling in her studies, is soon forced to leave school because of her mother's illness, but not before Richard has given her a gold ring, and received a lock of hair in return. Then Richard's attention is caught by the imminent outbreak of the Civil War.

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[11] Miller, op. cit., p. 104. Connolly, op. cit., p. 62, states: "Judge Wade was married, in 1863, to Miss Bernice Calpin, a most amiable and accomplished English lady. They have one daughter, Miss Clare L. Wade, who has recently graduated from Wellesley." (Miller's history, cited above, gives the middle name of Wade's daughter as Lyon. It is not certain whether Wade himself contributed this article to the History, but it is possible, since he wrote the section on the history of the law in Montana.)

[12] Wade, op. cit., p. v.

There is no doubt in his mind concerning the eventual issue between Right and Wrong.

> Upon one side of the combat he saw arrayed the Spirit of Freedom...in the shadow of whose influence the human intellect, unshackled and unchained, entered upon a career of wonderful growth and development, offering to man the fruits of peace and Equality, and erecting for the toiling millions happy homes, around whose blazing firesides came thronging in all the comforts of life, smiling children, free labor, free schools, free churches, free thoughts, and free men. Upon the other side he saw the Spirit of Slavery and Oppression....Thus were the forces gathering, and the question was not that of Union or no Union, but it was: Shall Liberty, Equality, and the Rights of Man be lost forever and blotted from the face of the earth.[13]

Richard visualizes the coming war as a Homeric conflict in which the Goddess of Liberty leads forth battalions against the Queen of Slavery. "It was the charge of Progress against Ignorance, of Civilization against Barbarism, of Light against Darkness."[14] Impelled by such reasoning, Richard joined the Union Army.[15]

On the battlefield, Richard recognizes a dying soldier as Clare's father and obtains his permission to marry his daughter. He returns from the war with this hope, but Clare and her mother have disappeared from the village without trace. Deferring, but not forgetting his thought of Clare, Richard then enters the law office of an old

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[13] Ibid., pp. 82-83.

[14] Ibid., p. 84.

[15] Richard answered President Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers for three months' service just as Wade himself had done, the difference being that Richard served throughout the war while Wade returned to his law practise after the three-months' enlistment. Here is another example of the novelist's ideal projection of his own experience.

family friend, Judge Kent, to "read for the law." Meanwhile, Clare, now an orphan, has been adopted by Dr. Hume, the physician who attended her mother's final illness, and has gone to live with him and his sister at their estate in a Boston suburb. In the characterizations of Judge Kent and Dr. Hume, Wade shows a profound respect for the two professions of law and medicine; the practise of Judge Kent, who took only such clients as he wished, appears to typify Wade's own ideal of a career in the law.

Clare, now a young lady, has a suitor, an attractive young man named William Stacy, who is also a law clerk with Judge Kent. Stacy and Richard thus become associates, if not friends, and although their talk never turns on this personal matter which might have led Richard to Clare, the conversations give voice again to Wade's thoughts on wealth and preferment as opposed to honest worth. For Wade, these concepts seem always to have been in opposition. Stacy is the opportunist, out for wealth and power no matter how achieved.

Passages between Stacy and Richard bring into focus a number of liberal and scientific ideas of the century. As a biographer comments, "It is probably needless to say, at this late point, that Judge Wade has always been a Republican, and that he has always been liberal in his religious views."[16] These facts are suggestive to the reader of

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[16] Connolly, op. cit., p. 61.

the following passage:

> For these debased and distorted ideas and thoughts of this young man society is responsible, and if he is led to a life of vice and crime,....if he worships the god of wealth and sacrifices his soul and his life upon its unholy altars,.... you the slaves, who glory in servitude to pampered wealth and pride...are the authors of the darkened and vicious ideas of this young man; you are the creators of this ruin, the builders of this soiled temple, wherein dwells a soul putrid with corruption; from you he has learned his ideas of life and duty, and because of you he will hurry on to his doom....In our unscrupulous struggle for wealth, position, and influence we compromise the Great Creator and make Him as contemptible as ourselves....Every fungus growth of aristocracy, every feeling that creates social castes, circles and classes, because of temporary circumstances and conditions, every action and every thought that denies the Brotherhood of Man, is also a denial of the Fatherhood of God.[17]

Meanwhile Clare, despite her lack of worldly experience, has been able to discern Stacy's evil tendencies and to see that his chief interest is in the future inheritance of her guardian's wealth; besides, she has always remembered her childhood teacher although she is too modest to suppose that he still thinks of her. She refuses Stacy, who bitterly vows revenge. The doctor then takes Clare to Europe to recover from the experience.

The European scenes, particularly those in London and Berlin, give Wade opportunity to demonstrate his learning and to dwell on subjects he probably knew well both from his wife, who was an Englishwoman, and from the letters of American literary men traveling abroad which he must have known in periodicals of the time. In Berlin, Clare meets a

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[17] Ibid., pp. 201-202.

young scholar named Edward Palgrave, of Philadelphia, who is drawn to the doctor "by the strange affinity that so fascinates and unites men of genius the world over."[18] Palgrave is an ideal sentimental hero, handsome, grave, and considerate, but Clare still remembers her old teacher, and hence their meetings take the form of literary discussion rather than flirtation.

> Dickens was Clare's favorite author, and "David Copperfield" her favorite story; Palgrave came forward as the champion of Auerbach, and maintained that Dickens had written nothing to surpass "On the Heights," and being a true American, put in a good word for Howells's "Chance Acquaintance," and the other writings of that gifted author; while the Doctor insisted that "Ten Thousand a Year" was the best story ever written. They recalled their favorite characters in either (sic) of these stories....At last Palgrave said: "The creation of these characters bespeaks genius and a profound knowledge of human nature. No story is of any consequence whatever, unless something can be learned therefrom. The characters must not be overdrawn, but must be true to nature, and illustrate some characteristic of the human mind or of the human heart...."
>
> "It seems to me," said Clare, "that it is not material where a good thought is found if we are benefitted by it; and I believe by the study of Dickens, Shakespeare, Longfellow, Whittier, Bryant, Howells, or Holmes, we can learn very much of ourselves. They are the expounders of human nature....But thinking,...must be directed into the right channels, for the world of evil actions is always preceded by and is the effect of a world of wicked thoughts."[19]

Unfortunately Palgrave has a severe attack of unrequited love, reminiscent of the Gothic novel; he goes mad and when he is found wandering in the countryside, he lapses into a coma from which only the presence

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[18] Ibid., p. 275.

[19] Ibid., pp. 277-279.

of Clare will rouse him. His sanity is restored, but his feeling for Clare has changed. Henceforth "he looked upon her as a saint to be worshiped, instead of a woman to be loved."[20]

Clare and her guardians return to America to find that Stacy has been busy with a scheme of revonge and that their home, which also seems to entail the Doctor's fortune, is in jeopardy. Stacy, in collaboration with two shyster lawyers named Popper and Sharp, has forged a will and secreted it where it can be conveniently found to prove that the property does not belong to Doctor Hume but to a weak drunkard whose brain has been so impaired by alcohol that he connives with the conspirators without understanding what he is doing.[21]

When Dr. Hume retains his old friend Judge Kent as legal adviser, the denouement of the plot is seen as Richard, now a full-fledged lawyer, goes to work on the case. Meanwhile Clare encourages her old guardian.

> Her education had not been in vain. She possessed an equanimity that held steady the balance of her mind in the midst of the storms of life; and if in prosperity she was not elated with success, so adversity did not morbidly depress her.[22]

Acting on an inspiration that the will may be spurious, she embarks upon a trip which takes her back to England, where she discovers the true will. When she returns at the eleventh hour with testimony which

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[20] Ibid., p. 299.

[21] Ibid., p. 238: "he was a young man of promise, but in an evil hour had been tempted by the fascinating charms of the fashionable wine cup....Strong drink had corrupted his moral nature and stupefied his conscience, as it always has and always will."

[22] Ibid., p. 343.

will clear Dr. Hume's title to his home, and win the lawsuit she is of course astonished to find that Richard is her guardian's counsel. The action of the novel ends with a triumphant reunion in which not only Richard and Clare, but Richard's friend Johnny and his long-lost fiancee, whom Clare met on shipboard, are restored to each other. Wade concludes his book with the traditional last chapter which settles everyone's destiny. "And thus the married life of Clare and Richard glides on like a beautiful river."[23]

It may be concluded from reading Clare Lincoln that this was not a novel which might set a pattern to be followed by other Montana novelists; Clare Lincoln is nostalgic and imitative rather than original in the sense of employing local materials and dealing with the problems of a new environment. Justice Wade's intellectual interests looked outward from Montana. The use of ideal situations in Clare Lincoln is perhaps a negative indication of the Montana background and a natural creative reaction to the turbulence and confusion of the mining frontier. Regional self-consciousness in the Montana novel was a thing of the future.

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[23] Ibid., p. 451.

II

EDWARD S. ELLIS AND OWEN P. DABNEY: The Dime Novel Tradition (1890's)

This section will show that the rise of the dime novel was to result in a strong "Wild West" influence on Montana novels of the 1890's. While the first Montana novel discovered in this search, Clare Lincoln, by Decius S. Wade, looked back to the Eastern and European traditions of the novel, the works of fiction by Edward S. Ellis, and Owen P. Dabney, which appeared fifteen to twenty years later, dealt with the adventures of pioneers on the Montana frontier. These writers of the nineties did not live in Montana. It is clear from his book that Ellis had not visited the state and it is doubtful that Dabney knew Montana conditions at first-hand. Only their use of the Montana setting warrants their inclusion in this study.

The dime novel began with publication of Mrs. Ann Sophia Winterbotham Stephens' novel, Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter, by Beadle and Company, New York, in 1860. This first dime novel was a rather staid affair, for as Edmund Pearson points out, "The writers of the early dime novel were reverently following the lead of Cooper and Scott, and had not the slightest intention of composing 'sensational fiction.'"[24] But the immediate popularity of the inexpensive paper-backed volume led to a demand which Beadle was to meet for thirty years or more

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[24] Edmund Pearson, Dime Novels; or, Following an Old Trail in Popular Literature (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1929), p. 4.

by publication at intervals of two weeks or oftener,[25] of adventurous tales which soon fell into a characteristic formula. The dime novel reader expected, and got, plenty of action, constant danger from Indians and wild animals, simple characters, a high moral tone, and a rousing denouement in which all the villains were killed off and the hero won the girl. Beadle kept what might be called a stable of authors; they had offices in the loft of the publishing house from which they frequently produced a seventy thousand word novel a week. One of Beadle's authors, Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, is credited with writing six hundred dime novels under various noms de plume, including that of Buffalo Bill.[26]

The popularity of the dime novel is shown by the standard order of the American News Company for sixty thousand copies, which often were sold in a week; some novels ran into ten or twelve editions.[27] Dime novels were shipped by cords and bales like firewood to the Union armies during the Civil War (where they were also coveted and acquired by the Confederate troops).[28] Some years after the peak of their popularity

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[25] George C. Jenks, "Dime Novel Makers," The Bookman, 20:112, October, 1904, says that at one period around 1872 Beadle was publishing a dime novel every business day.

[26] Loc. cit.

[27] Ibid., p. 113.

[28] Ibid., p. 109. This type of popularity was achieved by the comic books in World War II.

in this country, dime novels were still giving the people of other countries a strange and highly-colored picture of American life. An editorial writer in The World's Work during 1908 was able to comment:

> Our consuls report—and this is good news—that the original dime novels have a considerable sale in translation in Barcelona and Madrid and in Central and South America. The Spaniard will whip us yet if he continue to take such nourishment when we leave it for the same kind of gallant degeneracies in literature upon which he once fed and fell.[29]

A significant result of the dime novel was its impact in shaping American attitudes toward the frontier. Even those who knew the West could not resist thinking of it in dime novel dimensions. Writes Charles M. Harvey in an Atlantic Monthly article, 1907:

> The writer of this article has a far more vivid picture of some of the red and white paladins whom he met in Beadle's pages than he has of any of Red Cloud's, Spotted Tail's, or Black Kettle's fierce raiders, whom he saw at unpleasantly close range, or of the white warriors who alternately defeated them and were defeated by them, in the irruptions into Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Wyoming, in the later sixties and early seventies.[30]

This, then, is the background for Edward S. Ellis's novel, The Path in the Ravine, published by Porter and Coates, Philadelphia, in 1895, as No. 2 of the Forest and Prairie Series. Ellis had been a Beadle author ever since 1860, when as a youth of nineteen, teaching school in Trenton, New Jersey, he presented himself at the Beadle

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[29] Editorial, "About Dime Novels and Others," The World's Work, 16:10416, July, 1908.

[30] Charles M. Harvey, "The Dime Novel in American Life," Atlantic Monthly, 100:37, July, 1907.

offices with his manuscript of Beth Jones; or, the Captives of the Frontier, which sold many hundreds of thousands of copies.[31] Besides dime novels, Ellis wrote a great number of other books: histories, biographies and novels, even school history texts which had wide circulation. Harvey remarks in the article already cited (1907) that Ellis's books then exceeded the sixty-seven years of his life; "as a writer of Indian tales he easily holds the world's long distance record."[32]

Ellis had never been to Montana; when he chose the Bear Paw mountains as setting for his story, The Path in the Ravine, he simply went to work with a map and described the country with a cartographer's accuracy as to names of creeks and other physical features:

> The Big Sandy Creek flows from the southwest, and like its own tributaries, Duck Creek, Box Elder, and smaller streams, has its source among the wild fastnesses of the Bear Paw Mountains, while the Beaver Creek, Peckham's Creek, Clear Creek, Snake Creek, People's Creek, and others, rise in the Little Rocky Mountains and flow into the Milk River to the east of the fort.[33]

He neglected to become as well informed about Montana flora. He gives us a "species...of ivy" climbing in the Bear Paws

> ...as it does along the walls of the old baronial castles of the Rhine....Here and there among this wealth of vegetation a violet flower gleamed like a jewel against the emerald background, while the trunk of one huge vine...dangled downward as if it were an immense serpent watching for its prey in the depths below.[34]

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[31] Pearson, op. cit., p. 33.

[32] Harvey, op. cit., p. 39.

[33] Edward S. Ellis, The Path in the Ravine (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates), 1895, p. 6.

[34] Ibid., p. 18.

Dabney, in his Montana novel of the same period, seems equally uncertain about the Montana landscape. His heroine takes a nap on "a little pillow of moss and ferns"[35] in the Crazy Mountains, where this woodland detail of a more humid climate is out of place.

Ellis's novel is a tale of the mishaps befalling two young soldiers whose duties permit a remarkable amount of riding around the country in search of adventure. Wild animals and Indians share honors as the sources of excitement with such natural disasters as "an avalanche of water" like the Johnstown flood. Incident crowds on incident. In the first sixty pages, the two friends find the mysterious path of the menacing vine; force their trained horses to leap over dangerous washouts; confront mountain sheep, a huge wolf, and a grizzly bear; lose their horses while fighting the bear and find themselves in the path of "a stream like Niagara" sweeping down the gorge. Fortunately they were "young, strong, rugged, and with good habits," and had "served an apprenticeship in campaigning in the Northwest," so they were able to survive; one wonders how, when he reads that their provision for meeting the flood was:

> "Good-by, Russ!"
>
> "Good-by, Al, old boy!"
>
> The two clasped hands...and they stood thus in affectionate embrace while the awful avalanche of water came.[36]

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[35] Owen P. Dabney, True Story of the Lost Shackle; or, Seven Years With the Indians (Salem, Oregon: Capital Printing Co., 1897), p. 16.

[36] Ellis, op. cit., p. 65.

Since, however, no disaster was ever strong enough to destroy a dime novel hero of good habits, the friends survive the flood only to encounter new dangers: Russ has been swept into a tree whose other occupant is a mountain lion, and Al, to save himself, has seized an object which turns out to be the tail of the recently hunted grizzly bear. Both escape, find their horses, and are ready for the encounter with The Wildcat, a Blackfoot Indian whose rather obscure movements fill the rest of the story with constantly-impending danger. "Chivalry is not so common among the American Indians as some people suppose," observes the author.[37] But even The Wildcat is softened by the acquaintance of an eight-year-old white child, Little Bessie, daughter of Hadley Rainsford, "an individual of intelligence and culture"[38] who is living alone with his daughter in a frontier cabin. Some nameless tragedy has caused his disaffection with society, but in aiding the two young soldiers, he is restored to a more charitable mood and decides to see that Little Bessie has the benefits of a gentler education than that afforded by life on the Montana frontier. In the conclusion, Ellis announces, "Number Three of the Forest and Prairie series will be The Young Rancher, a story of the Wyoming cattle ranges in 1892."[39]

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[37] Ibid., p. 185.

[38] Ibid., p. 199.

[39] Ibid., p. 319.

Ellis's novel is bound in boards and has the appearance of an ordinary novel, but when we come to The Lost Shackle, or Seven Years With the Indians, by Owen P. Dabney, we find the true dime-novel format: a paper-backed volume five by seven and one-half inches in length and width and half an inch thick. The book, could easily be tucked into a pocket, which could be purchased by almost anyone at the price stamped upon the cover, twenty-five cents. High prices of the '90's had apparently affected even the dime novel; or perhaps the increase derives from the price formula which set higher prices, because of higher costs west of the Rocky Mountains. For The Lost Shackle is one of the few Montana novels with a Western publisher: Capital Printing Co., Salem, Oregon.

Dabney's life story is not known and only the Oregon imprint suggests that he may have been a Westerner. He at least did not know the dates of Montana history, for he places his emigrant farm family in the Crazy Mountains in 1857, seven years before the first agricultural settlement in that area.[40] Dabney may have been an Iowan, for his book reveals an understanding of farm life in the Middle West and this is the type of life which his characters, two farm families which have emigrated from Iowa, adopt in their Montana activities. Methods of handling cattle, landscape descriptions, pietistic elements in the novels, are all derivative of the Middle Western background.

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[40] The first agricultural settlement in this part of Montana was in the Gallatin valley in 1864.

Because Dabney seems to have known and loved the life he writes of, even if it bore little resemblance to actual conditions of the time in the Montana setting of his novel, his story at least does not echo the encyclopedia and atlas, as does Ellis's. What it does faintly resemble is the nineteenth-century family adventure novel as typified by Swiss Family Robinson. The leave-taking of the Ainley and Bentley families from their relatives in the Iowa farming community and their subsequent "weary journey of nearly six weeks"[41] across country to Montana have a warm human appeal. It does not seem surprising to Dabney, writing in the '90's, that the two families (with only two able-bodied men) should have made the journey through Indian country alone and without incident, observing the Sabbath as they traveled--"The families always aimed to spend the Sabbath in rest and devotion, as nearly as possible like it would have been spent were they at home."[42]

The two families settle in a valley within sight of the Crazy Mountains and take up a Rousseauistic existence in which it always seems to be high noon. To Lillian, the young daughter of the Ainsley family, falls the task of looking after the cattle. She is thus the first "cowboy" in the tradition of the Montana novel, but her holding herd

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[41] Dabney, op. cit., p. 9

[42] Ibid., p. 9. For an account of the dangers of an actual wagon trip from Wisconsin to Montana in 1864, see Arthur Jerome Dickson, Covered Wagon Days (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1929), 275 pp.

would amaze anyone who was familiar with the life of the Montana range:

> While the cattle browsed off the willow twigs or lay about in the grass or perhaps waded in the cool mountain brook, Lillian would often take out the little Bible which Grandma Ainsley had given her and spend a quiet hour perusing its sacred pages.
>
> Sometimes as she quietly sat there day dreaming amid the soft air delicately scented with wild flowers, the gently murmuring brook and the sweet songs of the meadowlark, she would be lulled into a quiet nap and sleep until the cattle began to grow restless and wander off.[43]

But one day Lillian awakens from her noonday nap to find herself surrounded by—Indians! They seize her and bind her arms "so that she was unable to shield herself [from] the branches."[44] The author does not explain how she manages to tear small pieces from her apron and drop them along the trail. But it does no good anyway, as "every shred she dropped was as carefully gathered up by the old Indian who followed in the rear."[45] Dabney also does not explain how she "often" found opportunity to cut her name on the trees in hope that it might attract the eye of some hunter who had heard of her disappearance. But no one does see these traces, even her father who searches diligently. "He feared some wild beast had devoured her, yet, in that case, what had become of her pony?"[46]

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[43] Ibid., p. 16.

[44] Ibid., p. 18.

[45] Ibid., p. 18.

[46] Ibid., p. 20.

Lillian is well treated by the Indians and eventually becomes as happy learning beadwork as she was tending her father's cattle. She becomes friends with the daughter of the chief, and the two girls have many pleasant excursions through the woods together, after the manner of most young ladies in nineteenth century fiction. Meanwhile one is a little surprised to note that the two white families have quite soon resigned themselves to their daughter's loss, all except Mathew Bentley, who was Lillian's playmate. It takes him seven years to reach his majority, but on that fateful September day when he becomes twenty-one, he announces that he is going to search for Lillian. Like all dutiful boys of his time, he has felt that his first duty has been to his parents. There is a suggestion that this was legally required. It is interesting to see the play of these and other contemporary ideas in the following passage:

> The fourth day of September at last came and Mathew Bentley felt that he was now a free man, not that his father really compelled him to remain with him and work out his full time. Far from it. But Mathew felt that it was his duty to do so, and he was one of those kind of boys that whatever he thought his duty to do he was willing to perform...
>
> Mr. Bentley, who noticed his son looking so melancholy, at last said, "Well, Mathew, I suppose you feel that you are a man today. Have you come to any conclusion as to the vocation you wish to follow?"
>
> "I can't decide that now, father," he said, "for I have an undertaking before me which I must attend to first."
>
> "And what is that," inquired his mother, very much concerned? (sic)
>
> "Well, mother," he said slowly, "I have never forgotten Lillian and believe she is still living and I must find her."
>
> "Oh, nonsense, my son," replied Mr. Bentley, "there is no doubt but that the poor girl has been dead these many years, andyou had

> better go and locate on that piece of land across the creek, for someday there will no doubt be a railroad running up this valley and it will be valuable property."
>
> Mathew's only answer was, "I must find Lillian."[47]

On his search Mathew has many adventures; he is menaced by a buffalo stampede, wrongly accused of the hold-up of the Helena-Fort Benton stagecoach when he accidentally fell in with the real robbers, and badly injured when he makes his escape, still wearing the shackle which the U. S. Cavalry soldiers placed around his leg in capturing the suspected road agents. The practised reader of such stories will have no trouble guessing who rescued Mathew from his plight and nursed him back to health: Lillian and her friend the Indian princess. As soon as Mathew is strong enough, he and Lillian make their escape and return to their people. Dabney's grammar was outstripped by his enthusiasm in describing the reunion:

> When Mathew and Lillian reached the top of the hill Mathew exclaimed, "There's father at the gate." He took off his hat and waved it....Tears of joy came to Mr. Bentley's eyes, for he well recognised that wave, and called his wife to come quickly who, throwing her apron on her head, came out. Mr. Bentley full of joy exclaimed, "Our dear son is coming, I know it is Mathew." They were so near by this time that they heard what he said.
>
> "Yes, father, your innocent boy and your long lost daughter," Mathew exclaimed as he and Lillian sprang from their tired horses.[48]

Mathew and Lillian are married; Lewanna, the Indian princess, comes to live with them, and at last marries a wealthy young rancher, and everyone lives happily ever after.

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[47] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[48] Ibid., p. 94.

Although it is difficult to know what portion of American readers read the dime novels, one might infer that the dime novel public was composed of relatively unsophisticated persons including, largely, young people. That this is in part the case is suggested by a concluding portion of Pearson's book, Dime Novels, called "Reader's Recollections." Pearson shows, however, that the young people who read dime novels grew up to be such men as William Lyon Phelps and Stephen Leacock, in the literary world, and William Beebe, marine biologist, and Walter S. Adams, director of the Mt. Wilson Observatory, among the scientists. It is probable that the dime novel colored the thought of a whole generation of Americans and helped to form a concept of the West as a place of simple problems, stirring adventure, and freedom from the dull routine of city life.

III

MARAH ELLIS RYAN AND A. MAYNARD BARBOUR: Conflicting Attitudes in Montana and the East (1890's)

Two women writers of the 1890's show the emergence of diverging outlooks on life between Montanans and easterners. They are Marah Ellis Ryan and A. Maynard Barbour, whose work deals with the Montana of the current period.

After the publication of Clare Lincoln, presumably the first novel written by a Montanan, there was a lapse of nearly twenty years before the first treatment of the Montana locale. Because they look backward, to the dime novel tradition, The Path in the Ravine, (1895), by Edward S. Ellis, and The Lost Shackle, (1897), by Owen P. Dabney, were the next two books considered. Actually, however, the next Montana novel to Clare Lincoln in date of publication was Told in the Hills, (1891), by Marah Ellis Ryan. This novel, together with The Award of Justice, or Told in the Rockies: A Pen Picture of the West, (1897), by A. Maynard Barbour, marks the first Montana work by women novelists.

Mark Twain and Bret Harte had already by 1890 conveyed in short stories and sketches the traveler's impression of the central Rocky Mountain area and the Far West. Thus Mrs. Ryan's novel, Told in the Hills, belongs to an American tradition quite as healthy as that of the dime novel; the book might be called the first Montana tourist novel.

The railroads had recently brought the Northwest into easy access from the East.[49] As a natural consequence, Mrs. Ryan's plot tells the story of a group of Easterners of wealth and culture who had decided, for reasons never quite clear to the reader, to make their home in the Kootenai River country of Northwestern Montana.

It was probably as a tourist that Mrs. Ryan had her knowledge of Montana, if, indeed, she did know it at first hand.[50] She was living in Pennsylvania at the time the novel was published. The titles of her published works, some ten novels, which range from A Flower of France to My Quaker Maid, indicate that she was decidedly eclectic in her choice of backgrounds.[51] A second novel with Northwest setting, That Girl Montana, (published ten years later), has its background in British Columbia, and one is tempted to conjecture that Mrs. Ryan knew the country

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[49] The Northern Pacific reached Montana in 1881, the Great Northern in 1887.

[50] Although listed as a Montana author both at the library of the Historical Society of Montana in Helena and in the Montana Authors collection at Montana State University, Missoula, Mrs. Ryan was a native of Pennsylvania, and according to the Woman's Who's Who of America, 1914-1915, was still living there twenty-five years after Told in the Hills was published. Mrs. Anne McDonnell, librarian of the Historical Society of Montana, writes, January 9, 1948, that her search has yielded no trace of Mrs. Ryan's ever having lived in Montana.

[51] John Williams Leonard, editor, Woman's Who's Who of America, 1914-1915 (New York: The American Commonwealth Company, 1914), p. 710.

from the train windows of the Great Northern and Canadian Pacific Railways. Of the scant data available on her life, it is perhaps pertinent that she was "on the stage" for five years, retiring in 1890.[52] She may have known the Northwest through travel with a theatrical troupe, in which case she might have left us a far more valuable account than the two novels.

The tourist novel of Montana is more self-conscious in its treatment of the Montana setting than is the novel derived from the dime novel. Here is not so much the wide-eyed expectation of brave adventure and new opportunity, as a sense of escape from the burdens of over-civilized living. "When life grows old and stale in civilization, I come up here and straightway am young again,"[53] says one of the main characters of Told in the Hills, a Kentuckian, in speaking of the spell which the Kootenai country holds for him. This is not the Turner type of frontiersman! Nor is this viewpoint shared by all of the newcomers. One of the ladies takes a dissenting view of the freshness and freedom of life in Montana:

> "I thought at first all the freedom of social laws out here was so nice: but it isn't. It has a terrible side to it, when the greatest scamp is of as much account as the finest gentleman, and expects to be received on the same footing."[54]

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[52] Loc. cit.

[53] Marah Ellis Ryan, Told in the Hills (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1891), p. 359.

[54] Ibid., p. 206.

A theme of the story may be traced far back in American fiction; it held continuing fascination for the nineteenth century novel reader (cf. The Octoroon; Malaeska, The Indian Wife of the White Hunter). This was the problem of the sexual code between white men and the women of other races. Was Genesee Jack, who could "look a Lancelot in buckskin,"[55] a squaw man? If so, his only defender, even in part, is the heroine, who observes,

> "The more I see the narrowness of social views, the less I wonder at old MacDougall and Genesee taking to the mountains, where at least the life, even the life's immoralities, are primitive."[56]

It subsequently develops that the Indian woman in question was a Blackfoot princess whom Jack had chivalrously rescued from mistreatment and taken as housekeeper, but he realises, and the other characters agree, that this association cuts him off from the society of his white peers.

The mawkish treatment of the question of illegitimacy would seem to justify the attitude taken by a writer in The World's Work who pointed out weaknesses of this type of 'effeminate' latter-day variation of the dime novel which

> ...deals with sex instead of six-shooters and with maudlin women instead of adventurous men of quick eyes and strong muscles. It is a product of an indoor, self-conscious sort of life, and not of the plains and the mountains and of men of mettle.[57]

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[55] Ibid., p. 139.

[56] Ibid., p. 139.

[57] Editorial, "About Dime Novels and Others," The World's Work, 16:10416, July, 1908.

Told in the Hills has little to recommend survival as a piece of literature; it is, however, of a certain historical interest because it reflects that dissatisfaction with "civilized" life at the end of the nineteenth century which turned people's thoughts to far places where life was simple and, presumably, good. And it found readers in its own time. Norman A. Fox, of Great Falls, Montana, a writer of Western fiction of the present day, comments, "Read today, the piece Told in the Hills is incredibly quaint, the style redundant, but my mother tells me that it was quite a famous novel in its day, and I recall that it was made into a silent movie when I was a small boy. If memory serves me right, the movie came along about 1920—some thirty years after the book was published."[58]

Could Told in the Hills have been "a famous novel" because of the growing dichotomy expressed between Western ways and standards and the traditions of the East? Mrs. Ryan was, in fact, the first novelist in treatment of Montana to bring these ideas to the surface. A. Maynard Barbour takes this emphasis still farther, in a story which shows the contrast between attitudes of Montanans and those of upper-class Easterners who visit Montana on mining business or as vacationers.

A. Maynard Barbour's novel, The Award of Justice, or Told in the Rockies: A Pen Picture of the West, was published in 1897 by

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[58] Letter from Norman A. Fox, March 21, 1948.

Rand, McNally and Company, Chicago, who were also Mrs. Ryan's publishers. The Award of Justice is better plotted and sustained than Mrs. Ryan's book; a reason for its greater air of conviction is Mrs. Barbour's first-hand knowledge of the locale. Although born in New York, she came to Helena following her marriage in 1893 to William G. Barbour, a clerk with the Great Northern Railway. She is listed in the Helena city directory from 1894 to 1902 and during those years worked as a stenographer.[59]

Montana is not specifically stated as the setting for Mrs. Barbour's book; however, Silver City, the mining center of the story, suggests Helena, except that the mines themselves are an hour's train trip away. Frequent use is made of the mining economy which Mrs. Barbour must have known well from her association with the Helena business world, and there are details, such as the Cornish miners, which fit naturally with a Montana mining scene.

For the most part, however, The Award of Justice is the story of a group of upper-class Easterners who are transplanted to Montana for a period, and who, when the story is done, presumably return East. The exception is the mysterious 'black sheep' of the story, who, although restored to his family, regenerated and forgiven, elects to remain in the hills.

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[59] Information compiled by Mrs. Anne G. McDonnell, librarian of the Historical Society of Montana in Helena, indicates that Mrs. Barbour held a number of secretarial positions, two of her employers being the Surveyor-General of Montana and A. J. Craven. She also had an office as public stenographer. The Woman's Who's Who in America, 1914-1915, gives her residence as Boston and indicates that she had been deaconess in charge of the House of Mercy (Episcopal) since 1907.

The 'Jack' of this story is so reminiscent of Mrs. Ryan's 'Genesee Jack' that one wonders if Mrs. Barbour was aware of borrowing.

This figure of the mysterious renegade, usually a model influence in the story whose reticence hides some grave error of the past, goes back in the Montana novel to the dime novel derivatives, as has been shown. Presence of such a character in a large percentage of the early Montana novels reflects, of course, that pattern of pioneer life in which one's neighbor's history was his to tell or not as he chose. As a plotting element, the mysterious origin of a main character was a great asset to a novelist. In The Award of Justice there are not one, but two such mysteries and they are cleared up by such coincidences of design and accident as to make even the most credulous reader pause and consider that fiction is, after all, stranger than truth.

The use of coincidence in this novel is stretched to such lengths as to demand serious concentration of the reader if he is to keep the plot elements clear in his mind. Everyone who enters the story has some connection with the Northwestern Mining, Land, and Investment Company, but some have been set to spy on others. Their dissemblance takes such forms that it is not easy to decide which side the characters are on. By another stretch of coincidence, the new arrivals in Silver City are in great proportion, members of the same graduating class at Harvard. All told, plot complications make the telegraph office in Silver City one of the most overworked in fiction.

This was the period of sharp class distinctions in both East and West and the considerable class consciousness of the time shows frequently in such dialogue as "Whatever 'her class' is, she is deucedly your superior, you contemptible puppy!"[60] An interesting passage of this type is the conversation which takes place when a mine-owner, just arrived from the East, unexpectedly meets the daughter of a wealthy Eastern friend, posing as a vacationing school teacher:

> "Is Helen here with you?"
>
> "No, sir, she and George are in Denver."
>
> "And who is stopping here with you?"
>
> "No one; do you think I need a guardian, or a chaperon?"
>
> The old man's eyes twinkled; "You always were an independent sort of girl, and pretty level-headed, too, I must admit; but, my dear child, is it safe for you to be out here alone among the miners, and this rough class of people?"
>
> Miss Gladden laughed; "Did you see any very rough people today at dinner?"
>
> "Why, no, to be sure, I did not, but then, there must be many of them out here in this neighborhood."
>
> "I never see them," said Miss Gladden, "I associate only with the people you met today; no one here knows that I have wealth; so really, I am safer here than at home, where I am known."
>
> "But there is no society here," protested the old gentleman.
>
> "I came here to get away from society; there is plenty of refined and pleasant companionship, and if I have friends here, I know they are sincere friends, not money worshipers, or fortune hunters."[61]

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60 A. Maynard Barbour, The Award of Justice; or Told in the Rockies: A Pen Picture of the West (Chicago: Rand, McNally and Company, 1897), p. 57.

61 Ibid., p. 90.

Attitudes toward business methods, and laboring groups, and, in general, an awareness of the conflict between capital and labor, are illustrated in this book to a greater extent than in the other novels examined. A raconteur at table concludes the story of a business coup:

> "You won't believe me, but I bought that mine for five hundred dollars, cash, and they thought I was the biggest fool and tenderfoot that ever came out here. I tell you, I made sure of a good, clear title to that property, and then I went to work. I followed the old, original vein, and in less than six weeks time I had gold just a-pouring out of that mine. My! but didn't that company try to get back then! but I wouldnot have anything to do with them.... Well, sir, I worked that mine eighteen months, and cleared, over and above expenses, one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and then I sold it for half a million, and those other fellows have been kicking themselves ever since."
>
> There was a hearty laugh at the termination of the story.[62]

Contrast with this a miner's speech at the death of a townsman:

> "If he'd'a been a union man, we'd'a taken care of 'im, but he worked for the bosses, and helped 'em to make big money, and now, let the bosses take care of 'im and bury 'im."[63]

The gulf between the employing-class and the workers is not again so sharply suggested in the Montana novel prior to 1914. In the novels of cattle-ranching, it is minimized, as might be expected from the conditions of ranch life, both historical and contemporary. However, conflict between Eastern and Western attitudes was to continue its thematic importance in Montana novels.

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[62] Ibid., p. 100.

[63] Ibid., p. 199.

IV

FREDERIC REMINGTON AND HELEN G. SHARMAN: Historical Novelists (1902)

It has been observed that the first Montana novel considered in this study, Clare Lincoln, looked back to the New England tradition. Then came the dime novel derivatives, the novels of Ellis and Dabney, in which a spurious Montana tradition was exploited. It was not until the early 1900's that historical fiction about Montana was written by persons who really knew the state.

The year 1902 saw publication of two such novels, John Ermine of the Yellowstone,[64] by Frederic Remington, the artist noted for his western scenes, and The Cave on the Yellowstone, or Early Life in the Rockies, by Helen G. Sharman.[65] Remington's book deals with the period of the sixties and seventies, while Mrs. Sharman's subject is the Montana of fur-trading days in the 1830's. Both books were based on fact. Remington had been in Montana as early as the summer of 1881[66] and on numerous other trips had renewed his knowledge of the plains Indian and army life. A footnote in his novel tells us the origin in Montana legend of one of the central characters, while the other characterisations are too 'real' to

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[64] Frederic Remington, John Ermine of the Yellowstone (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1902), 271 pp.

[65] Helen G. Sharman, The Cave on the Yellowstone, or Early Life in the Rockies (Chicago: Scroll Publishing Company, 1902), 371 pp.

[66] Harold McCracken, Frederic Remington, Artist of the Old West (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1947), pp. 30-31.

have been derived from any source but that of thoughtful observation.

Mrs. Sharman had lived in Montana since 1872, most of the time on a ranch near Logan.[67] The setting of her novel is country that she knew well, as attested by a number of footnotes giving the present names of the landmarks, some seventy years after the events of the story. In the opening pages she tells us that the book is a true story of the experiences of Louis Bleau, a French Canadian whom she met while living in Portage County, Wisconsin, during the 1860's. Bleau had come to Montana from Montreal in 1830 with a party of about thirty men, to hunt and trap and prospect for gold. Mrs. Sharman, then a young school-teacher, had listened with interest to his tales of adventure in Montana of the fur-trading days. Subsequently she married Louis C. Bevier and moved to Missouri, where he died in 1869. With her son, Louis, she herself came to Gallatin City,[68] Montana, in 1872. Apparently she had not forgotten the stories of Louis Bleau.

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67 Biographical material on Mrs. Helen C. (Wilmot) Bevier Sharman from the files of The Historical Society of Montana, Helena.

68 Two or three successive settlements near Three Forks were named Gallatin City, according to Mrs. Anne C. McDonnell, librarian of the Historical Society of Montana in Helena. The town no longer exists.

In 1878, she writes at the conclusion of The Cave on the Yellowstone,

> I visited Wisconsin and had furnished rooms in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Bleu for almost eight months, and talked with him many times about his experiences in the Rocky Mountains, and located many of the places, which at that time I knew so well, in Montana. Mr. Bleau was then seventy-six years of age.[69]

Mrs. Sharman (then still Mrs. Bevier) returned to Montana late in 1878 and married Henry G. Sharman, teacher and rancher. He died in 1892 on the ranch near Logan where they had made their home; his widow was still living there when her novel appeared. One might suppose that this story from the lips of a man who had been a trapper in the days of the Mountain Men, written by a woman who knew the setting intimately through thirty years' residence, would have the authentic ring of truth. Here, indeed, should be the epic narrative of men in the wilderness. It is disappointing that neither the times nor the novelist were ready for such a performance. Even cannibalism, in Mrs. Sharman's hands, becomes somehow genteel.

The plot of the novel deals largely with Robaire, a French trader, his Indian wife, their son and daughters. The girls have been sent East to school, but the boy has been raised at home. He speaks, however, in

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[69] Helen G. Sharman, The Cave on the Yellowstone, or Early Life in the Rockies (Chicago: Scroll Publishing Co., 1902), p. 370.

measured literary accents:

> "My mother is a good, true woman, and although she belongs to the Indian race and has a dark skin, she is gentle in her manner, and her heart is as pure and white as that of any of the highborn ladies of whom you speak....I know not what villainy you are plotting, nor what work you have laid out for me to do, but I do know it will be nothing to your credit or to mine."[70]

Robaire's daughters conduct themselves in the family tepee as if they were in an Eastern drawing-room:

> Robaire took a pardonable pride in showing off his daughters' accomplishments, they played the violin and guitar and sang well. Their father had sent them to an eastern city, where they had remained in school for four years, having returned but a few months before.[71]

His wife also has the graciousness of a gentlewoman:

> His wife was a noble, intelligent-looking Indian woman of middle age. The kindly expression of her soft dark eyes and the pleasant smile with which she greeted us and made us welcome, at once won our regard and made us feel at ease. She spoke the French language fluently and almost perfectly.[72]

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[70] Sharman, op. cit., p. 43. Bernard DeVoto, Across the Wide Missouri (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 9, makes this observation with regard to the white man's version of Indian speech: "It is a happy circumstance of history that Indians have always spoken the fashionable rhetoric of the period, whether a Donne-like imagery in Massasoit's time, the periods and balances of Doctor Johnson in Logan's time, or the McGuffey eloquence now [1833] attributed to the Flatheads."

[71] Sharman, op. cit., p. 34.

[72] Ibid., p. 34.

While these Europeanized Indian and half-breed characters seem somewhat out of place in Montana of the 1830's, there were actually strange islands of civilization to be found in the Northwest of the early days, and the Robaire tepee may have been one of them.[73]

If Helen G. Sharman invests her French-Canadians and Indians with late nineteenth-century graces, the other historical novelist of Montana, Frederic Remington, whose book appeared the same year as Mrs. Sharman's, writes almost from inside the minds of the Crow Indian, the miner, the soldier, and the scout of the sixties and seventies. Mrs. Sharman's prose lacks life; Remington writes with vitality, in an extremely flexible style which can dance with the mood of a bright day on the prairie or sustain the tension of a somber climax. He brings to his writing the same vivid observation, the sense of color and form, the feeling for motion, and the faithfully rendered detail, which he gave his paintings and drawings.

Mrs. Sharman's narrative is loosely put together and the

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[73] Merrill G. Burlingame, The Montana Frontier (Helena: State Publishing Company, 1942), p. 59, gives the following information about Natawista Iksana, daughter of a Blood chieftain, who in 1840 became the wife of Alexander Culbertson, a leading personage in the Montana fur trade: "Reports are unanimous that Mrs. Culbertson was a beautiful woman of rare charm and judgment, and of inestimable aid to her husband in his work with the Indians."

highly-contrived crisis, when it comes, seems super-imposed.[74] Remington had plot-trouble too, but not until the end of his story. The events of the first three-quarters of John Ermine of the Yellowstone grow easily and naturally out of the life of the time and place. The reader has a constant sense of authenticity; every page seems to speak out and say, "This is the way it was."

Although the events of the story take place shortly before Remington himself knew Montana, he had shared the kinds of life described, and he seems to have been impelled from his earliest acquaintance with the West, by a desire to record what he recognized as a vanishing way of life. From the beginning of Montana history, it seems, the tenderfoot has been told that the great days are gone. Of his introduction to Montana in 1881, Remington writes a quarter-century later:

> Evening overtook me one night in Montana and I by good luck made the campfire of an old wagon freighter who shared his beans and coffee with me. I was 19 years of age and he was a very old man. Over the pipes it developed that he was born in western New York and had gone west at an early age. His West was Iowa. Thence during his long life he had followed the receding frontiers, always further and further West.

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[74] Besides Robaire, the trader, there is another Frenchman of middle years in Mrs. Sharman's book. He is a priest who lives alone at a mission on the Yellowstone. Robaire's daughters wish to marry two of the young men in the trapping party, so the whole group journeys to the mission for the wedding. Here Robaire and his wife are both killed by hostile Indians and the brides and grooms mysteriously avoid each other after the ceremony, the whole party traveling together back to Montreal with a sense of gloom and tragedy. It turns our eventually that the priest was Robaire's long-lost brother and that Robaire had made a large cash settlement on his daughters' husbands on condition that they return the girls safely to Montreal where, following a year's lapse, they might be remarried if they so desired. Melodramatic as this now sounds, it was a reasonable plan for safeguarding the two young women. True love triumphed and both couples were remarried.

"And now," said he, "there is no more West. In a few years the railroads will come along the Yellowstone and a poor man cannot make an honest living at all."...

The old man had closed my very entrancing book almost at the first chapter. I knew the railroad was coming. I saw men already swarming into the land. I knew the derby hat, the smoking chimneys, the cord-binder, and the thirty-day note were upon us in a restless surge. I knew the wild riders and the vacant land were about to vanish forever—and the more I considered the subject, the bigger the forever loomed.

Without knowing exactly how to do it, I began to try to record some facts around me, and the more I looked, the more the panorama unfolded....I saw the living, breathing end of three American centuries of smoke and dust and sweat; and I now see quite another thing where it all took place...but it does not appeal to me.[75]

Remington is frank to own his nostalgic interest in the West:

If the recording of a day which is past infringes upon the increasing interest in the present, be assured that there are those who will set this down in turn and everything will be right in the end. Besides, artists must follow their own inclinations unreservedly. It's more a matter of heart than head..."[76]

Of the four men writing at the turn of the century, Remington, Owen Wister, Emerson Hough and Theodore Roosevelt, who probably did most to influence the impression of the West formed in America and abroad, three, Remington, Wister, and Roosevelt, were close friends, and all expressed the feeling that the great days of the romantic West were past. Remington, Wister and Roosevelt were all men of good family and fine educational background in the East, who had come West as youths, their

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[75] Harold McCracken, op. cit., pp. 34-36, citing "A Few Words from Mr. Remington," Collier's Weekly, March 18, 1905.

[76] Loc. cit.

minds fired with reading about the West,[77] to seek what they were already prepared to find: the last of the great adventurous days. The West for them was bound up with the generous dreams of youth; their West has colored the thought of two generations.

Remington's novel, John Ermine of the Yellowstone tells the story of a white boy who grows up as a Crow Indian, "White Weasel." The mystery of his origin is never solved. Miners at Alder Gulch in 1864 attempt to "rescue" the lad from the tribe encamped nearby, but he is recovered by his Indian foster parents, as seems to Remington right and proper, since "Little Weasel" has known no other people since babyhood and is bitterly unhappy with the white strangers.

The portion of the story dealing with Weasel's boyhood and youth are well-written and show keen observation of Indian camp-life and tribal customs. The Indian viewpoint is constantly stressed; one comes to know the literal, almost tactile, habits of Indian thought:

> He was born white, but he had a Crow heart, so the tribesmen persuaded themselves. They did not understand the laws of heredity. They had never hunted those.[78]

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[77] Clearly this reading included the dime novel and popular journalism as well as the journals and historical works. Robert Taft makes this suggestion about Remington in his article, "The Pictorial Record of the Old West," The Kansas Historical Quarterly, 16:113-135, May, 1948, wherein he cites Remington's autobiographical essay in Collier's Weekly for March 18, 1905. Remington himself mentions Catlin, Gregg, Irving, Lewis and Clark as arousing his incentive to go West. Taft adds that popular literature of the day probably influenced him considerably also. The immediate reason for his first Western trip was the desire to "get rich out West" so that he could afford to marry.

[78] Remington, op. cit., p. 22.

Remington could summon a poet's imagery and an artist's sense of color. These qualities combine with the observation of Indian life in many passages, of which the following is but one example:

> The faint rose of morning cut the trotting herd into dull shadowy forms against the gray grass, and said as plain as any words could to White Weasel: "I, the sun, will make the grass yellow as a new brass kettle from the traders. I will make the hot air dance along the plains, and I will chase every cloud out of the sky. See me come," said the sun to White Weasel.
>
> "Come," thought the boy in reply, "I am a man." For all Indians talk intimately with all things in nature; everything has life; everything has to do with their own lives personally; and all nature can speak as well as any Crow.[79]

Remington's prose is capable of sharp, vivid pictures, as "gaunt, hammer-headed, grass-bellied, cat-hammed, roach-backed ponies,"[80] or it can describe a scene in quieter key: "Then he made out the figure of a man, low in tone and softly massed against the snow, and beside him a cabin made of logs set against the rock wall."[81] This scene is a description of White Weasel's first sight of Crooked-Bear, the counselor venerated by the Crows, to whom Weasel's foster father takes the youth when he is nearing manhood, because Crooked-Bear also is a white man. The character of Crooked-Bear, whose physical deformity not only saved him from death at the hands of the Indians but caused the beginning of

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[79] Ibid., p. 25.

[80] Ibid., p. 88.

[81] Ibid., p. 40.

their veneration for him, is plausibly handled by Remington and based, his footnote tells us, on

> a deformed man of wild mien and picturesque apparel who used to come into the mountain towns (there were none on the plains then) at rare intervals to do a little trading, with gold dust in payment. He would then depart for the Indian country, which was almost totally unknown to the mining people, and was often followed as far as white men dared to go. He was always a mystery. The Indians had driven the old trapping-men from the country upon the approach of the white tide, and as yet the buffalo-hunter and cow-boy had not made their appearance.[82]

Crooked-Bear gives White Weasel the name of John Ermine and begins the slow process of teaching him to read and write and think as a white man. When he has done all that he can for the young man, he sends him out to offer his services as scout for the United States cavalry at the nearest fort. The old man knows that the day of the Indian is passing and he wisely feels that scouting with the Army is the best way for John Ermine to begin his association with his own people. In this way the young man will be able to use his very considerable Indian skills and at the same time to embark on a white man's career. He will not need to make war on his own people; the Crows are on friendly terms with the whites, and the Sioux, whom John will scout against, are the common enemy.

Thus far the story is beautifully told and the impingement of the white man's Fort upon the young man's consciousness is a fine description not only of the possible reasoning of a mind so trained, but

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[82] Ibid., p. 42.

of army life on the frontier. This Remington knew at first hand, having himself served as a scout in the Dakotas under General Miles, during the Sioux uprising of 1890.[83] John Ermine conducts himself creditably and is making a place for himself in the white man's world when he falls in love with the daughter of one of the officers. This is his downfall. The girl is a shallow, flirtatious sort whose aim, after the custom of the period, was to have as many beaux as possible. John Ermine is insulted by a young officer, one of his rivals for her affections. He hot-headedly wounds the man, and flees, for comfort and counsel, to his friend Crooked-Bear. The old man is unable to dissuade him from his plan to go back and kill his rival.

> All the patient training of Crooked-Bear, all the humanising influences of white association, all softening moods of the pensive face in the photograph, were blown from the fugitive as though carried on a wind; he was a shellfish-eating cave-dweller, with a Springfield, a knife, and a revolver.[84]

So the "cave-dweller" returns to the army camp on his murderous errand; but before he can slay his rival he is himself fatally shot from behind, as he stands looking through a window, under cover of darkness, at the girl he loves. The murderer is a renegade Indian who has nursed a grudge against Ermine because he would not let him shake hands with the young woman on her visit to the Indian scouts' camp.

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[83] McCracken, op. cit., pp. 62-68.

[84] Ibid., p. 268.

The latter portion of John Ermine of the Yellowstone is for a number of reasons inferior to the beginning. Remington wrote well while he was unhampered by too many plot requirements, but a constraint comes over the narrative at about the time the love interest enters. The introduction of a typically capricious heroine of popular fiction weakens the story. It is difficult for a modern reader to share Remington's enthusiasm for this thoughtless, spoiled young woman who deliberately plays her suitors against each other. When Crooked-Bear attempts to reason with John Ermine, our sympathies would be with the man who had been raised apart from white civilization:

> "I knew, Crooked-Bear, I knew you would talk that way. It is the soft talk of the white man. She made a fool of me, and he was going to put his foot on me as though John Ermine was a grasshopper, and every white man would say to me after that, 'Be quiet, Ermine, sit down.'...It is the way with their women to set a man on fire and then laugh at him."[85]

The weakness of the ending stems, perhaps, from the unresolved conflict in Remington between his admiration of the primitive and his loyalty to the particular white civilization of his time. He could not quite see John Ermine, a noble fellow but uncouth, getting the girl. So he had Ermine revert to pre-Indian "shellfish-eating" savagery and finished him off with the melodramatic and unanticipated shooting.

In spite of its faults, Remington's novel of Montana in the sixties and seventies is well worth reading for its picture of the meeting of Indian and white cultures on the plains. With the exception of Clare

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[85] Ibid., pp. 264-265.

Lincoln, Decius Wade's book published a generation before, it is the only Montana novel within the scope of this study whose writer shows real aptitude for the craft of serious fiction.

V

FRANCES PARKER AND THERESE BRODERICK: The Sentimental Novel of Ranch Life

> So far as her publishers have been able to learn, Miss Frances Parker, the author of the popular romance, "Marjie of the Lower Ranch," enjoys the distinction of being the only Montana woman who has been honored by bookcovers in fiction of outdoor life. It is a curious fact that the authors whose homes are in the new and yet undeveloped regions of the country usually write of life in great cities.[86]

The writer in the Butte Inter-Mountain may have been thinking of A. Maynard Barbour, whose Montana novel, The Award of Justice, dealt with urban society in Montana life, and whose other novel, That Mainwaring Affair (1901) is a murder story with a setting in a large city. Properly appreciative of Frances Parker's claim to honor for the state of Montana, the Butte Inter-Mountain continues a few weeks later:

> "Marjie of the Lower Ranch," Miss Frances Parker's breezy novel of the mountains of Montana, has been the compliment of a handsome offer from one of the leading book publishing houses of London for its rights for Great Britain and the colonies. The reader who passed upon it wrote that "it is one of the very few novels of Western American life that seem real to us."[87]

The "reality" of Marjie of the Lower Ranch[88] is a quality which has proved ephemeral; the novel is merely a sentimental story of the kind which must have been popular with not-too-discriminating readers of the period. Marjie might be more 'real' than the dime novels of the

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[86] Butte Inter-Mountain, November 12, 1903.

[87] Butte Inter-Mountain, December 1, 1903.

[88] Frances Parker, Marjie of the Lower Ranch (Boston: C. M. Clark Publishing Company, 1903), 393 pp.

West, but for a publisher's reader to speak of it in these terms so shortly after the publication of The Virginian, Owen Wister's novel of Wyoming (1902), seems surprising indeed. Possibly the enormous success of The Virginian had made almost any story of the West look like a publication hope for Great Britain and the colonies.

Both Marjie of the Lower Ranch, by Frances Parker, and The Brand: HW; A Tale of the Flathead Reservation,[89] by Therese Broderick, are inheritors of the Ryan and Barbour tradition, showing a spirited heroine from the East[90] as she adjusts to Western life, and pointing up the contrast between Eastern and Western attitudes. The Brand, both by its frequent geographical identification and its cattle-ranching detail, shows closer relation to actual Montana conditions, but both books suffer heavily from the influence of current light fiction. One questions the frequent arrival of boxes of American Beauty roses on a ranch near Polson forty years ago (in The Brand) just as one doubts that two men could work a gold claim on a creek for years without the owners of "the lower ranch" (in Marjie) knowing what was going on.

As Salt Lake City is the city spoken of in Marjie of the Lower Ranch, and homesteaders in the story mention coming "all the way up

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[89] Therese Broderick, The Brand: HW; A Tale of the Flathead Reservation (Seattle: The Alice Harriman Company, 1909), 271 pp.

[90] Marjie, it happens, received her education in California.

from Idaho,"[91] it seems reasonable to suppose that the setting of the story is the Beaverhead valley. Marjie (Margaret Navarre) comes as a girl of eighteen (all Montana heroines of this period are young) to make her home with her sister, who is a rancher's wife. By circumstance she spends a great deal of time at her brother-in-law's ranch and falls in love with Ike, the gentlemanly outlaw who has a hideaway on the creek above this ranch, where he secretly has a mine. Complications arise when the brother-in-law also falls in love with Marjie. His wife is addicted to drink and eventually runs off with the foreman to open a saloon in a nearby town. Meanwhile Marjie has saved the outlaw's life—"It was not strange that she knew how to nurse. It was natural, just as it was natural for her to be womanly"[92]— and proved her mettle as a Westerner: "'Be easy, now,' said Marjie quietly. 'Remember you are speaking to a lady—and a dead shot.'"[93] Marjie "possessed the rare quality of being able to say and do anything without offending people,"[94] which permitted her to go about improving her friends in the following manner:

> "Come, wake up! Get out into this glorious air, and if you listen well you will hear a sermon such as no human voice can preach. If you listen well and can't hear it, I advise you to take the 'starvation cure,' for your digestion must be badly out of order."[95]

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91 Parker, op. cit., p. 56.

92 Ibid., p. 146.

93 Ibid., p. 157.

94 Ibid., p. 172.

95 Ibid., p. 189.

Plot complications cause Marjie to doubt the honorableness of the outlaw's intentions[96] and she goes through a marriage ceremony with her brother-in-law. Happily she recollects herself:

> "Before God I am not your wife! I have never been your wife! Do you think a few words uttered by a pious man made me your wife? No! I am still Margaret Navarre, and I belong to him."[97]

The intervention of the sheriff shows that Ike is no longer an outlaw but Marjie's husband is under arrest for conniving with horsethieves; so the lovers are reunited with only an annulment standing between them and wedded bliss.

Throughout this book there is no sense of the everyday routine of ranch activities; there are no cattle or sheep, and horses appear only as mounts. 'Real life' in Montana still meant, to a publisher's reader, skulduggery and a hidden mine. By contrast, The Brand, Therese Broderick's story of the Flathead country, speaks of round-ups and stampedes and of such realistic details of ranch life as branding and the killing of a scrub bull. The prevailing tone of the novel is sentimental, however, and there is the same sort of cloying love story as seems typical of the women writers of Montana novels in the nineties and early 1900's.

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[96] In all the Montana novels before 1914, with the exception of the dime-novel derivatives and B. M. Bower, there is a good deal of rather prurient allusion to 'the fate which is worse than death,' an indication perhaps of the extreme conventionality of the times.

[97] Parker, op. cit., p. 359.

Mrs. Broderick knew the Flathead from fourteen years' residence at the time The Brand was published in 1909. Her autobiographical sketch in the possession of the Historical Society of Montana (undated) states that she was born in Wisconsin but came to Kalispell, Montana, with her husband in 1895 and lived in Kalispell most of the time after that date. She spent three years on a ranch on the west shore of Flathead Lake and it was there she wrote her novel, taking a year to its composition.

> The plot of The Brand HM is fictitious, but the characters, with the exception of the Indian agent, were drawn from real people, each of whom knew he was in my story.
>
> The frontispiece is a photograph of the heroine, Bess. I might add that a doctor in Wisconsin, after reading the story, came to Kalispell to find Bess. They met and fell in love, and soon after were married. They have lived in Brodhead, Wisconsin, for the past 27 years.[98]

The Brand tells the story of Bess Fletcher and her brother James, who come from New York to spend some time on the Flathead ranch of Henry West, a young part-Indian college friend of James's. James has already spent three summers on the ranch while he and Henry were at Harvard; he then intended to carry on his father's law business "but a severe illness necessitated his leaving the city and so he gladly accepted the offer of Henry West to come to his ranch and assume the foremanship."[99]

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[98] "Autobiographical Sketch of Therese Broderick, Author of The Brand HM," from files of Historical Society of Montana, Helena.

[99] Broderick, op. cit., p. 17. It's hard to know what effectiveness an ill man would have as foreman of a ranch; however this is a strong pattern in the Western tradition. Both Roosevelt and Wister came West for reasons of health.

> Colin West, the father of Henry, was a Scotchman, of education, tact and good judgment; a man respected by everyone with whom he came in contact. Fate or fortune had placed him in the West while still a young man. His wife was of half Indian blood, and yet one of the most refined and intellectual of women. Her son was proving himself an able manager of the vast herds of cattle and buffalo which Colin West had accumulated, and since his death four years ago, Henry had had the entire management of the ranch.[100]

A central theme of the novel is the position of the Wests, mother and son, as half-breed and quarter-breed Indians. Bess is always making blunders of the "But you don't look like an Indian!" variety. She is "surprised to find such evidences of refinement, wealth and comfort here—away out in Montana and on an Indian reservation!"[101]

Bess, whose own mother has been dead for many years, soon is calling Mrs. West "Little Mother," but she is reserved in her manner toward Henry and he realizes that his Indian blood prevents him from being considered as a suitor. The occasional necessary evils of ranch life, such as the capture and destruction of a scrub bull which has trespassed on the HW range, are thought of as Indian brutalities by Bess:

> Bess was still standing at her horse's head, watching the distant chase....Stamping her foot..., she cried out in vain, "Oh, you two horrid men! Leave that poor creature alone! What will you do when you do capture him? Murder him, of course! James, have you lost all your sense, to follow that—that—Indian! Yes, that is all you are now—an Indian thirsting for the blood of your victim!"[102]

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[100] Ibid., p. 17.

[101] Ibid., p. 49.

[102] Ibid., p. 82.

Henry himself realizes the terrible limitations placed upon him because of his Indian blood:

> "Sometimes...I wish all I knew was how to wrap my blanket about me!...The great outside world does not want me, cannot understand me. What need or comfort are the things which the world has taught me, when after all, my winding-sheet will be but a blanket? What right has the world to give me a desire for knowledge, a taste of heaven, an understanding of the past, a dread of the future, and then hold up its hands to say, 'You are still an Indian.'"[103]

The plot deals with Bess's effort to make up her mind to marry Davis, the Indian agent. For a girl of twenty, even one who has been raised in a convent, she is remarkably unable to know her own mind in this matter. Finally, she brings herself to accept him, only to find, on the wedding day, that he is the seducer who, by horrid coincidence, ruined the lives both of Henry's dead sister and the sister of Bess's best friend in the East. The book ends with Bess recovering from her unfortunate romance and realizing that she has loved Henry all along. He has told her to come back "'when you can forget—<u>that I am an Indian!</u>'" Bess's last word for the reader is "'Henry—Henry West! <u>I—have forgotten!</u>'"[104]

The book is weakened by the melodramatic plot element, by stilted dialogue, and by a general inability to suggest its setting. The scene at St. Ignatius Mission could be any Catholic church, anywhere. There is no special differentiation of the landscape except as an appurtenance

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[103] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 103.

[104] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 270-271.

to a mood.[105] And it is hard to believe in the general good sense of a person like Bess who would, in answer to a casual question at the Indian celebration, "How long have you been in the West, Miss Fletcher?", remark:

> "How long! Oh, how long? When was I not here? Here my heart has been since God's divine touch first made those hills! Here my soul shall be when they have passed away!"[106]

Still, this sort of thing must have had meaning for a reader in its own day. Otherwise, what would have brought the doctor out from Wisconsin to search for Bess?

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[105] Ibid., p. 99. "'Come, little Mother, let us go out by the lake and watch the moon rise. We each need God and nature tonight.'"

[106] Ibid., p. 165.

VI

B. M. BOWER: Tradition-Maker of the Montana "Western"

(1906 onward)

A complaint often heard about popular Western fiction is voiced by a cowboy in The Lure of the Dim Trails, one of B. M. Bower's early novels:[107]

> "There's a lot in this country that ain't ever been wrote about, I guess;...But the trouble is, them that know ain't in the writing business, and them that write don't know."[108]

Bertha Muzzy Bower was a Montana writer not guilty of this accusation. She had lived in Montana since early childhood, and as one biographer puts it, "she was permitted to roam the Montana ranges and fraternize with cowboys."[109] From long association with cattle and cowboys she acquired not only her accurate use of detail, but a way of looking at life as if through a cowman's eyes. Most of her readers

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[107] B. M. Bower's full name was Mrs. Bertha Muzzy Bower Sinclair Cowan. The Library of Congress Catalogue of Printed Cards lists her as Mrs. Bertha (Muzzy) Sinclair (pseud. B. M. Bower), and this form will be followed in the Bibliography. Her pseudonym, B. M. Bower, will be used in the discussion of her work in part VI.

[108] Mrs. Bertha (Muzzy) Sinclair (pseud. B. M. Bower), The Lure of the Dim Trails (New York: G. W. Dillingham Company, 1907), p. 41.

[109] Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, editors, Twentieth Century Authors, a Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1942), p. 169.

thought B. M. Bower was a man.[110] Her characters flavored their speech with an occasional 'damn' or 'hell', they sat in on poker games and shot up saloons, and they put in long hours of exhausting work, in all weather, on the range. More significant, they spoke an authentic language still heard on Montana's cattle ranches. They knew what it was to top off a horse or turn a cow, to night-hawk or ride circle on round-up, to hold herd through a long day while the cutting-out process went on at shipping time. A loyal public, in Montana as elsewhere, followed B. M. Bower through the sixty-three volumes represented by entries in the Library of Congress Catalogue of Printed Cards.

In 1890, at nineteen, Bertha Muzzy was married to Clayton J. Bower. She was subsequently married twice, to Bertrand W. Sinclair of Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1906, and lastly to Robert E. Cowan, a Texan. Sometime prior to 1920 she left Montana for California. Except for a short interval when she lived at DePoe Bay, Oregon, she spent the last twenty years of her life near Los Angeles. She died July 23, 1940.[111] Beginning in 1906 she published at the usual rate of two novels a year, the stories of Montana by which she is remembered. The first to appear, and one of the most successful, was Chip of the Flying U, which was issued in 1906. The following year saw the publication of four B. M. Bower novels, perhaps indicating that the author had built a small stockpile.

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[110] Librarians at Missoula Public Library, where B. M. Bower's popularity continues undiminished, report that this impression still prevails among readers.

[111] Kunitz and Haycraft, op. cit., p. 170.

Chip of the Flying U staked out the Bower country: the range-land between Fort Benton and the Bear Paw Mountains in Montana. The cowpunchers of the Flying U, known as "The Happy Family" in a title applied by themselves sometimes in derision and sometimes in mutual esteem, were to figure in numerous novels and short stories of the Flying U Ranch.

The Flying U characters appear only in the first of the B. M. Bower novels which were published before 1914, the time limit of this study.[112] During the years from 1906 to 1914, they figured in a number of short stories in Street and Smith magazines[113] and their continuing popularity caused Mrs. Bower to use them many times in her novels after 1914.

B. M. Bower knew how to begin her novels effectively. Six pictorial-action verbs arouse the reader's interest in the opening of Chip of the Flying U, which is a typical instance of Mrs. Bower's use of rapid action and informative detail:

> The weekly mail had just arrived at the Flying U Ranch. Shorty, who had made the trip to Dry Lake on horseback that afternoon, tossed the bundle to the "Old Man" and was halfway to the stable when he was called back peremptorily.
>
> "Shorty! O-h-h, Shorty! Hi!"

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[112] B. M. Bower novels discussed here, with date of publication, are as follows: Chip of the Flying U (1906); Her Prairie Knight (1907); The Lure of the Dim Trails (1907); The Range Dwellers (1907); Rowdy of the Cross L (1907); The Long Shadow (1909); The Uphill Climb (1913). Lonesome Land (1912) and Good Indian (1912) were not available.

[113] Mrs. Bertha (Muzzy) Sinclair (pseud. B. M. Bower), The Lonesome Trail (New York, G. W. Dillingham Company, 1909), 297 pp., is a collection of these stories.

> Shorty kicked his steaming horse in the ribs and swung round in the path, bringing up before the porch with a jerk.
>
> "Where's this letter been?" demanded the Old Man, with some excitement.[114]

In six of the seven B. M. Bower novels examined, the adjustment which a tenderfoot must make to the range life of Montana supplies the element of conflict for the plot. The tenderfoot in Chip of the Flying U is Miss Della Whitmore, sister of the ranch owner, whose imminent arrival from the East is announced by the letter in the passage just cited.[115] Miss Whitmore, a recent graduate of a medical school, wins the affectionate regard of the Happy Family, who nickname her "the Little Doctor." Their approval does not render her immune from a certain amount of hazing, for as an Eastern man in another B. M. Bower novel observes, "there seems

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[114] B. M. Bower, Chip of the Flying U (New York: G. W. Dillingham Company, 1906), p. 7.

[115] The tenderfoot appears in every Bower novel before 1914 except Rowdy of the Cross L. The incidence of this character-type is as follows: Her Prairie Knight deals with the choice to be made by an Eastern girl between two suitors, a titled Englishman and a Montana ranchman. A spoiled San Francisco playboy becomes a successful cowpuncher in The Range Dwellers and wins as his bride the Eastern-bred daughter of a neighboring rancher. The Lure of the Dim Trails is about a New York writer who becomes a cowboy in order to pick up "atmosphere" for his Western stories but ends by marrying a Montana girl and settling on a ranch. A girl secretary who comes to Montana in search of the missing heir of an estate is the heroine of The Uphill Climb. The only major-character tenderfoot in the seven novels who is not treated as a young romantic hero or heroine is Alexander Dill, the middle-aged mid-westerner in The Long Shadow who invests his savings in a Montana stock ranch.

to be a certain class-prejudice against strangers out here."[116]

B. M. Bower's work marks the first appearance in the Montana novel of this prejudice against the tenderfoot.

The Little Doctor's attitude toward the cattle business seems naive even for a tenderfoot:

> Miss Della Whitmore gazed meditatively down the hill at the bunk house. The boys were all at work, she knew. She had heard J.C. tell two of them to "ride the sheep coulee fence," and had been amazed by the order. Wherefore should two sturdy young men be commanded to ride a fence, when there were horses that assuredly needed exercise—judging by their antics—and needed it badly? She resolved to ask J.C. at the first opportunity.[117]

Presumably this Westernism is understandable enough for anyone to catch; but such touches of humor at the expense of the "dude" have endeared B. M. Bower to many a bunkhouse reader.[118]

Of the seven plots, Chip of the Flying U seems to grow the most naturally out of the simple elements of ranch life. Chip's horse is hurt and the Little Doctor is able to save it through her medical knowledge. A humorous incident at a dance brings Chip and the Little Doctor together again as conspirators to keep a secret. Then Chip is hurt in an accident with a horse, and in his long convalescence there

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[116] B. M. Bower, The Long Shadow (New York: G. W. Dillingham Company, 1909), p. 70.

[117] B. M. Bower, Chip of the Flying U, p. 45.

[118] Kunitz and Haycraft, op. cit., p. 170, cite an editorial in The New York Herald Tribune at the time of Mrs. Bower's death, which comments that the bulk of the market for western fiction is in the West.

develops a romance between him and the Little Doctor. It is she who recognizes his very considerable skill as an artist of range life and she who arranges for him to sell his pictures and win success as a cowboy artist. It is a simple, not improbable story, full of humorous passages, written always with a sure knowledge of the cattle business from bunkhouse to round-up.

The other Bower novels which come within this study are inferior in construction and characterization to Chip of the Flying U. Three of the 1907 novels, Her Prairie Knight, The Lure of the Dim Trails, and The Range Dwellers, tell an almost identical story, that of the urban sophisticate who adjusts to life on the prairie. A sketch of the plot of The Range Dwellers suggests the treatment of this theme. It is the story of a wealthy, dissipated young son of a San Francisco railroad magnate who finds regeneration on his father's ranch in Montana, and makes peace between his father and a neighboring rancher when he falls in love with the rancher's daughter. There is some gunplay in this story, as riders from the railroad magnate's ranch are forbidden to use the most direct route to their shipping point because of the range feud. The Range Dwellers introduces the automobile for the first time into Montana fiction. Contrast between the simple life of the Montana range and urban society life appears in this novel characterization in the hero (who proves his worth as a cowboy) and the heroine and her guest from New York. One of the more reticent cowboys also betrays his origin in Eastern society by wearing the hero's evening clothes, in what started

out to be a joke, with grace and distinction; he marries the heroine's friend. A mad dash by private railroad car to California is one of the climaxes of the story and the book ends with a double wedding, parental reconciliation, and a wedding trip for both couples in the railroad magnate's private car. The awe with which railroads and their owners were viewed during this period is apparent in the story.

In this novel, as in Her Prairie Knight and The Lure of the Dim Trails, Mrs. Bower is imposing elements of currently-popular fiction on the simple ranch life described in Chip of the Flying U. The regeneration of the spoiled young man (The Range Dwellers), the titled English suitor of the American heiress (Her Prairie Knight), even the writer in search of material (The Lure of the Dim Trails), were all familiar figures in novels and magazine stories during the period. The Englishman has a plausible reason for appearing in the Montana range country, however; he is representing British interests in a large cattle pool.[119]

That the cowboy's attitude toward such tenderfeet was often tolerant is attested by Mrs. Bower — "'He doesn't seem a bad sort'"—[120] and borne out in the reminiscences of "Teddy Blue" Abbott, Montana cowpuncher

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[119] For an account of English investments in the cattle business of Montana and Wyoming, see Harold E. Briggs, Frontiers of the Northwest (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940), p. 256, or Burlingame, op. cit., p. 270.

[120] Bower, Her Prairie Knight, p. 30.

of the early days.[121]

An Easterner of humbler connections appears in The Long Shadow (1909). He is Alexander Dill a plain man from Michigan with money to invest in the cattle business. His partnership with a cowboy, "Charming Billy" Boyle, during the last days of the open range, forms one of Mrs. Bower's more realistic plots. The novel gives a good picture of the end of the cattle business of the old type and shows how the fencing even of leased lands around water holes could effectually break up a "big outfit."

The Uphill Climb (1913) is a temperance novel. Usually Mrs. Bower is tolerant of the cowboys' drinking and "whoopin' it up" in town; but in this story, she shows that the use of alcohol may lead to complications. It is a highly contrived plot in which a cowboy wakes up after a spree with the dim recollection that he went through a marriage ceremony the previous evening with an unknown young woman,

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[121] E. C. Abbott and Helena Huntington Smith, We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher (New York: Farrar and Rinehart Company, Inc., 1939), pp. 226-229, state: "Rich men's sons from the East were nothing new as far as I was concerned. The range in the eighties was as full of them as a dog's hair of fleas, and some of them were good fellows and some were damn fools. Quite a few, like Teddy Roosevelt and Oliver Wallop, who got to be Earl of Portsmouth later, made good hands and everybody liked them....Coming up the trail in '83, we had an Englishman with us,...a kind of guest of the outfit, on account of his titled connections...and I was supposed to look after him,...but he never needed no looking after. He had one of these eyeglasses with no string, and he could ride a bucking horse and never lose it."

after which the bride disappeared and he fought everyone in sight, including the preacher. The more sober townsfolk have spent the night building a jail for such emergencies in the future. From this rather comic opening, the novel changes to a serious description of the hero's struggle against the drink habit. This is not the manner of the Happy Family, who anticipated a harmless kind of carousal when they went to town and never let themselves be disappointed. Did letters from her readers cause Mrs. Bower to write this novel as a counteracting influence against the drinking scenes of some of her other stories?

Probably the most successful feature of Mrs. Bower's style is the ease of dialogue. She had a good ear for the commonplaces of Western speech, which she used in a natural manner. To anyone who knows Montana cattle-ranching, such dialogue has an authentic ring:

> "I guess Happy lost some of his horses las' night," said Slim at the breakfast table next morning....
>
> "What makes yuh think that?" The old man poised a bit of tender, broiled steak upon the end of his fork.
>
> "They's a bunch hanging around the upper fence, an' Whizzer's among 'em. I'd know that long-legged snake ten miles away."...
>
> "Well, maybe you better run 'em into the corral and hold 'em till Shorty sends some one after 'em," suggested the Old Man.[122]

It is in just such fashion, even today, that work on a stock ranch will be apportioned and orders given. The contrast in the employer-employee relationship between the Bower novels and a mining

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[122] Ibid., p. 128.

novel, such as The Award of Justice, by A. Maynard Barbour, is thus a sharp one. The cowboy took pride in the "outfit" he worked for and his loyalty and trustworthiness were usually far beyond measuring by the forty dollars of his monthly pay. As one of the Happy Family says, "Chip and I don't set up nights emptying our brains out our mouths."[123] This loyalty extended to money matters. "Teddy Blue" Abbott, Montana cowpuncher, says, "A real cow outfit had only one pocketbook."[124] Thus a situation in another Bower novel, The Long Shadow, where a foreman draws his own savings to pay the men in an emergency, is probably only a reflection of the loyalty he would expect from his employer, or from his fellows.[125]

Mrs. Bower's descriptive details are subordinate to plot or character elements, but when they come, they are right. Sometimes a line or two is evocative: "All about her stretched the rolling grass land, faintly green in the hollows, brownly barren on the hilltops."[126]

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[123] Ibid., p. 108.

[124] Abbott and Smith, op. cit., p. 249. Abbott attests to the cowboy's pride in his outfit, the ranch for which he was working.

[125] Abbott says, loc cit., "I've seen them come off herd, when one man had only forty or fifty dollars, and the others would lend him a hundred dollars to go to town. He'd pay it back sooner or later."

[126] Bower, Chip of the Flying U, p. 19.

A cowboy gallops with "his elbows flapping like the wings of a frightened hen."[127]

The mood of a summer night on the prairie emerges strongly in such lines as

> The deep breathing of three thousand sleeping cattle; the strong animal odor; the black night which grew each moment blacker, and the rhythmic ebb and flow of a cowboy singing to his charge. If he could put it into words; if he could but picture the broody stillness, with frogs cr-ekk, cr-ekking along the reedy creek bank and a coyote yapping wierdly upon a distant hilltop! From the southwest came mutterings half-defiant and ominous. A breeze whispered something to the grasses as it crept away down the valley.[128]

Fights and gunplay in B. M. Bower are well-handled and not so obtrusive as in the dime novels and less skillfully written Westerns. An interesting reflection of dime novel etiquette appears in Rowdy of the Cross L, where the villain of the piece, who is also the heroine's brother, is trampled to death at night in a corral while the hero and a posse wait for him to show himself. Convention had it, in the dime novel, that it was not good form for the hero to be required to shoot the villain; the author should contrive to have the villain destroy himself.[129]

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127 B. M. Bower, Her Prairie Knight (New York: G. W. Gillingham Company, 1907), p. 57. (This style of riding is still in vogue in some range circles!)

128 Bower, The Lure of the Dim Trails, pp. 65-66.

129 Jenks, op. cit., p. 109.

With B. M. Bower, the Montana novel reaches the period of World War I. While Mrs. Bower's Montana fiction was accurate in detail relating to the range life of Montana, her contribution did not lead to development of a more mature literature in Montana.

CONCLUSION

In Montana novels before 1914, no departure was found from the general trend of American fiction, although the development in Montana is usually later by a decade. The first novel so far discovered to have been written by a Montanan before the 1880's belonged to the mid-nineteenth century tradition of sentimental idealism. Novels of the nineties pertained either to the dime novel tradition or were conceived as popular fiction showing the contrast between Eastern upper-class attitudes and the life in Montana. The first decade of the twentieth century saw the appearance of two historical novels of Montana of which one, John Ermine of the Yellowstone, by Frederic Remington, was distinguished by genuine insight into the mind of the Indian and superior craftsmanship in writing. However, the theme was not new in American literature. Following the historical novels came two sentimental novels of contemporary ranch life which show little variation from the standard of popular fiction then current. The period closes with the early works of B. M. Bower, who beyond an accurate use of detail pertaining to Montana ranch life, made no original contribution, the significant "Western" having already been given to American literature in Owen Wister's novel, The Virginian, 1902.

With the exception of Decius S. Wade's nostalgic novel of New England, and Frederic Remington's historical study of the Indian and military frontier, the Montana novels before 1914 have no claim to the

attention of the serious reader. These two novels reflect the depths and subtleties of their authors' own adjustment to life; the others were written for the popular market and would have their highest appeal for the unsophisticated reader. B. M. Bower's continuing popularity shows that this market changes little in its requirements.

The deepest significance of the Montana novels therefore lies in the impressions they have given about life in Montana to a considerable body of readers. A reader of the early Montana novel (after Clare Lincoln) would conceive of Montana as a place of almost constant action and adventure, first with wild animals and Indians, then with outlaws, then (as Eastern attitudes grew stronger) with that figure of pre-World War I literature, the "cad."

Life in the open spaces of Montana, the Montana novelists indicated, made men and women nobler, more resourceful human beings. The Indian of the dime novel was a menace, but by the time of the later novels he was a noble person to be considered as a possible partner in romance. Montana was a place, the novels implied, where a man's past was his own business, and where many residents had lost touch with their earlier homes. The state was almost as full of people seeking their lost relatives as of newcomers learning the ways of the range. The tenderfoot was always shown as a wrong-headed person who got into difficulties if he persisted in his urban or Eastern ideas but who might be expected to win through to full participation in Montana life if he was willing to learn. All tenderfoot characters in the early Montana

novel were made of the right stuff; nothing is shown of the individual who could not adapt to the life. Persons in this fiction came to Montana for a number of reasons: to seek wealth and adventure, to escape the consequences of some difficult situation at home, to regain their health, to find moral regeneration, or to look for their relatives. In Montana they found a healthy life of action in the out-of-doors and an apparent levelling of social distinctions. Little emphasis is laid on the actual social distinctions within Montana at the time. The economic bases of Montana life in the novels are activities with a strong element of adventure, such as hunting and trapping, prospecting, and, later, the range cattle industry. The one novel of large-scale mining operations is told from the viewpoint of the Eastern entrepreneur. In all but this one novel, the way of making a living in Montana was a zestful out-door occupation, building strong, self-reliant men, generous and large-minded in their dealings with others.

The Montana novelists before 1914 were responsible only in small part for the creation of this picture which has helped to make the West a national legend, but they did their share to further the legend. In the process they built a nexus of ideas now as fully accepted by the majority of Westerners as by those who do not know the country; witness the popularity in Western states of Western movies, Chamber of Commerce pioneer days, and commercialized rodeos.

It would appear that the order of the Montana novel bears out Dr. Merriam's hypothesis: first came the pietistic, nostalgic novel

utilizing the literary materials of the older culture, then the novels celebrating the advantages of the new country and the achievement of those who were wresting a living from it. Uncertainty in the new culture may also account for the early appearance of historical fiction extolling brave deeds of the past in Montana. Conflicting claims of the two cultures, Montana and Eastern, appear in the fiction of the 1890's and continue to be felt until the end of the period studied. The descriptive element shows in B. M. Bower novels of Central Montana ranch life, but the analytical stage has not been reached by 1914.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

A Chronology of the Montana Novel before 1914

1876 Wade, Decius S.
Clare Lincoln

1891 Ryan, Marah Ellis
Told in the Hills

1895 Ellis, Edward S.
The Path in the Ravine

1897 Dabney, Owen P.
The Lost Shackle, or Seven Years with the Indians

1897 Barbour, A. Maynard
The Award of Justice, or, Told in the Rockies

1902 Remington, Frederic
John Ermine of the Yellowstone

1902 Sharman, Helen G.
The Cave on the Yellowstone, or, Early Life in the Rockies

1903 Parker, Frances
Marjie of the Lower Ranch

1904 Parker, Frances
Hope Hathaway

1906 Sinclair, Mrs. Bertha (Muzzy) (B. M. Bower, pseud.)
Chip of the Flying U

1907 Sinclair, Mrs. Bertha (Muzzy) (B. M. Bower, pseud.)
Her Prairie Knight
The Lure of the Dim Trails
The Range Dwellers
Rowdy of the Cross L

1909 Broderick, Therese
The Brand

1909 Sinclair, Mrs. Bertha (Muzzy) (B. M. Bower, pseud.)
The Lonesome Trail
The Long Shadow

1912 Sinclair, Mrs. Bertha (Muzzy) (B. M. Bower, pseud.)
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The Lonesome Land

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